

The Response

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[0 : 00] Well, like I said, we're wrapping up today where we began last week in this episode with angels and shepherds. Of course, in the first installment last week in verses 8 to 14, some shepherds were the surprising recipients of an angelic announcement that a child had been born in Bethlehem, was a message of salvation because the newborn baby was the long-awaited Savior, Christ, and Lord.

That's actually what the angel said. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord, which means that this good news of great joy, as they called it, that would be for all people, was good news because it related to their salvation, the forgiveness of their sins, eternal life and peace with God.

In other words, this was a gospel message. And what made it gospel or good news was the baby, Jesus, whom the announcement was all about.

And we were reminded last week that Jesus is the good news. Jesus brings great joy. And salvation is for all people who will trust him alone for it.

And this is the real Christmas message. When we think about it, and we remarked on that some last week, the Christmas message is not a message of peace in the sense of peace with one another.

[1 : 32] It's not a message of Christmas spirit. That is, that along this time of year, because Jesus was a good guy, that we're all good guys this time of year too, and that we do nice things for one another.

That's not what Christmas is about. The Christmas message, the gospel message, the only saving message, is Jesus himself, God in the flesh, come to take away our sins.

It says Kent Hughes, the Holy Spirit included this story in the scriptures so we would not miss the point, which is the real savior of the world was not Caesar Augustus, nor will it be any great world leader.

The savior of the world is Jesus, the son of God who came to earth veiled in Mary's flesh, was born in human flesh, lived in the flesh, died in the flesh, was resurrected in that flesh, and now lives in the same glorified flesh at the right hand of the Father.

This message of salvation, this message of Christmas and of the gospel has everything to do with Jesus as God. This is an incarnation message, and we need not forget that as we get into so many of these really unique elements of the nativity story, we might begin to lose sight of the fact that what this is all about, what all of this is pointing toward, is incarnation.

[3 : 05] God is with us. God has taken on humanity. And so we've thought a lot about, over the last few weeks, about what the gospel is.

But in today's text, as we wrap up this story with the shepherds, I want us to focus in particularly on what the gospel does. We've talked about what it is.

Now we want to see what it does. Because the birth of Jesus is not just a tale on which we muse, think about, or ponder.

It's a divine message to which we must respond, to which the people that we take this message must respond.

And it doesn't allow for indifference. People, I think, honestly, I think people that don't really understand the gospel and they don't really understand the word of God, even though they may identify as Christian, and culturally speaking, I think one of the big things that they miss here is that you can't, there is no allowance for indifference.

[4 : 15] In fact, indifference itself is a denial. You either come to the message of Christ and you see the person in the work of Christ, and that either drives you to fall before Him as Lord and Savior, or

it drives you away in rejection of Him, or at least in what the Bible says about Him.

There's no place in there for us to just kind of read the story or hear the message and kind of move on with our lives not thinking anything about it. That's not actually possible in this situation, because the gospel isn't just something that we study and understand intellectually.

The gospel is actually something to which we must respond. And so let's consider for a few moments this morning, using this story of the shepherds, let's consider what the gospel does and how we must respond, and how we're looking for people to respond when we share the truth with them.

Okay? Four things. The first one is this. The gospel beckons us to come and see. The gospel beckons us to come and see.

Now look with me at verse 15. When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

[5 : 33] And they went with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And so it's very simple. The angel appears to the men, he scares them to death, and then he clarifies, he calms them down, he clarifies the message.

I have good news for all people. It will bring great joy. It's about a baby. This baby's in Bethlehem, just down the road from where you are now. And what will distinguish this baby from every other baby that's in Bethlehem is this baby is lying in a feeding trough for animals.

It's in a manger. And so the implication being, if you go there to see if this is true, that this Messiah has come, it will be the one that you find in this stable in the manger.

That's the sense of what happens. The angels go away, and then the men look at one another and they say, Well, what are we doing here? We must go and see this thing. Let's go see if what the angel says is actually true.

And they make haste, and they run, and they go to Bethlehem, and they found Jesus exactly as the angel said that he was. And whenever a piece of news is conveyed to us, we process that on the basis of its direct impact on our lives.

[6 : 54] Now think about all of the headlines you read in a day. Whether you get your news from social media, or if you like the newspaper, or maybe it comes through an email, or you watch it on the television, or whatever it is you do.

Whenever you see the headlines, and whenever you hear the news briefings, you process each story based on its value to you personally. Now you may be moved in a particular way by a story, but if it's not really directly affecting you, or our world in general, it's pretty easy to acknowledge it, even give some sympathy, and then kind of move on from it, right?

But there is a type of news that comes to us from time to time that so grips us that we cannot help but pursue it further. Or maybe it takes some type of emotional hold on us to where we can't easily get it out of our minds.

We're pursuing it. We are thinking on it. We are trying to figure it out. We're trying to learn more.

And such was this news that the angel brought to the shepherds.

Can you imagine? This supernatural thing, this angel appears to you suddenly in the middle of the night, is something on its own that you're going to want to share.

[8 : 05] But even after that, the dynamic of this message that the angel brings, that salvation has come, and it's coming a baby, and this news so grips the shepherds that they could not quickly process and move on.

They immediately took action. They pursued it. They went to see. If this was true, let us go and see this thing, they said to one another.

And Luke says they make haste. Now think about that. This is the middle of the night. We've already been told that the angel appeared to them at night while they were in the fields with their sheep by night.

It's just the middle of the night. We don't know how many of them there were. We don't know how big their herds were. But we know they made haste to go to Bethlehem. Maybe a couple of miles they had to go to actually get to where the proper village was.

Now think about that. You can't take a herd of sheep with you if you're making haste in the middle of the night. It doesn't make sense. So one of two things had to happen. Either they looked at each other and they said, all right, you guys are the lowest on the totem pole.

[9 : 16] You got to stay here. We're going to go see the thing that the angel said. Or they collectively look at each other and they say, this is too big for us to care about these sheep right now.

We're going to leave the sheep and we're going to go see this child. We're going to go see this baby. And I think that's probably what they did. Maybe they had a makeshift pen for them.

I don't know. We don't know what they did or how they did it. But the implication, I think, of the scripture is that they are so impacted by this news that they are so enamored by this idea of salvation and Messiah that they leave everything behind to go to Jesus.

And the gospel is that kind of news, isn't it? You can't just simply acknowledge it and dismiss it. It beckons us to come and see, to come and see if these things are true.

And if you leave your herd, whatever that may be, and you will have to leave something to come to Christ. You'll leave your sin. It may require you to leave a career.

[10 : 24] It may require you to leave social standing. It may require you to even sever certain relationships that you have in order to do this. But whatever it is that your herd is, if you will leave that herd and pursue this Christ, you will find him as the shepherds did to be exactly as God has said, exactly what the message claims him to be.

You see, though faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, it is not a blind faith. And this is something for which I'm thankful because some of you more naturally are given to be trusting by nature.

And then there are natural cynics like me who want to blow a hole in everything that any type of information is actually conveyed to you. And what's so helpful about the call of faith in the gospel is that God does not say with this gospel, close your eyes, shut off your brains, and just do what I say. He could do that, but he doesn't. He doesn't do that. With the gospel, he says, no, here's my message. Come and see. Come and see. There's a lot of people that they just simply don't come and see.

It was Chesterton, I think, that said that it's not that people have read the gospels or the scriptures and found them wanting or lacking.

[11 : 58] It's that they have never actually come to the scriptures to actually see if there is verifiable data there. And the fact is that there is. And the question is, will you come and see it?

The question we must ask the people to which we take the gospel is, will you come and see? And you may say, well, am I supposed to go to Bethlehem? Is that what this is about?

Like, is this some kind of pilgrimage? Of course not. There's no manger for us to see. God's given us something actually far better than that. He's given us his own revelation.

He's given us everything we need in the pages of the Bible. And we can come and see right here.

We can see that the Bible is not only historically reliable as a historical document.

Even secular historians will at least agree to that. It's reliable because it is the very word of God. He has sent his messengers with his revelation.

[13 : 01] That's what we have in the Bible. And he beckons us to come and see. And so we read the Bible. We study it. We study it to see if these things are true.

And what you will find as you do that is that Jesus is exactly as we say he is. He's a wonderful Savior. He's the only Savior.

You just need only come and see. Well, that brings us to the second thing here. And that is that the gospel invites us to hear and believe. It invites us or beckons us to come and see.

It invites us to hear and believe. Now, it would be one thing for the shepherds to act out of just sheer intrigue to see what was going on with this. But I do think that Luke intends to communicate here that they were fully convinced.

They believed that Jesus was indeed this Messiah and Son of God. And their faith, I think, is demonstrated in the fact that they immediately began to share the news and they went back to their sheepfolds worshipping the Lord.

[14 : 09] This was a life-transforming event because they believed the gospel message. And again, Kent Hughes is helpful here. He says it is not enough to hear about Jesus.

It's not enough to peek in the manger and say, oh, how nice. What a lovely scene. It gives me such good feelings. The Christ who was born into the world must be born into your heart.

Religious sentiment, even at Christmas, without the living Christ, he says, is a yellow brick road to darkness. And there's a clear distinction as we think about these things.

There's a clear distinction between those who are intrigued by the stories of Jesus and those who actually acknowledge him as Lord and receive him as Savior. Those who are merely intrigued are gripped by religious sentiment, maybe.

Maybe it's just the, there's something attracted to them about the story or the narrative or the romance, perhaps, of what unfolds here. But those who actually receive him are true disciples.

[15:25] And the gospel message not only beckons us to come and see, it invites us to hear this truth and believe it for salvation. In fact, invitation is the best possible word for it because it is a divine invitation from God to believe.

Now think about this, kids. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 11. Remember he says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

It's an invitation from Christ. He says, come to me. You're labored. You're heavy laden in your sins. You're laboring in your efforts at goodness to try to be as good as you can and to try to earn maybe salvation or earn God's blessing in the best way that you can and I mean, you even go to church on Christmas morning for goodness sake.

And Jesus says to all of those people, the religious people and the people who are working so hard to gain some kind of favor with God and Jesus says, no, you need to come to me. You're laboring. You're heavy laden. Come to me and from me, you'll actually find true rest. True spiritual rest, he says. Because the story of the Bible is about God making a way for sinners to be reconciled to him with everlasting peace.

[16:53] And this story of Jesus' birth is just the beginning of how God brought his plan to fruition. Jesus, God's sinless son, came to pay the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross.

Then God raised him from the dead. We just sang about that, right? We just sang about it. God raised him from the dead, showing that Christ's sacrifice was effective, that it did what it was supposed to do.

It satisfied God's wrath against our sin. And this is the only way for our sins to be forgiven. It's the only way for us to be at peace with God.

And what's so wonderful about the whole thing is not only that God does it, but then God extends this invitation, just like you may get an invitation to a birthday party, or just like you may give an invitation to go on a date one of these days, or whatever it is, just like you may get an invitation to go and visit with someone this Christmas day.

So God extends an invitation, and he says, all who will come to me, all who will come and trust in Christ alone, will receive rest. I sung a song with the girls earlier this week.

[18:06] I don't know if they knew it. It was one that we came across looking for a different song, actually, but it's an old hymn that I remember singing growing up. And at the end of it, it says, oh, come to the Father through Jesus the Son.

You remember the Fanny Crosby song, to God be the glory? Oh, come to the Father through Jesus the Son and give him the glory. Great things he has done.

Because you can only come to God through his Son. You can come no other way, only through him. So the gospel says, come and see. And then it says, hear and believe.

Receive it. Thirdly, the gospel motivates us to go and tell. So there's come and see. There's hear and believe. Now there's go and tell.

Look at verse 17. And when they saw it, that is the shepherds, when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

[19:04] So they hear the call to come and see. They go to Bethlehem. They see the child. They receive the invitation to hear and believe. That's the implication of the text. And then they immediately go and start telling everybody they can possibly tell.

Thus, MacArthur says, they become the very first New Testament evangelist. Now, I don't know how they did this. This is the middle of the night. We already have established that fact.

I don't know if they just go and start waking people up. I don't know if they stick around for the night and once the sun comes up and before they go back out to the fields to check on the sheep, they find whoever is out and about in Bethlehem or whoever's on the road as they're making their way back.

All we know is that everyone, they began to come across, they began to share this good news of great joy that had been delivered to them. And for those who would think of Luke's gospel as some kind of fabrication or invention in Luke's mind, special note I think should be taken of the shepherds

being responsible for sharing this good news.

Remember last week, we talked about this with shepherds. They had a necessary occupation for a flourishing life in Israel, but they were not respected people. They were religiously, the religious people according to the Mishnah had actually banned them.

[20 : 26] They were considered perpetually unclean, which meant that they couldn't participate in the ceremonial things of Jewish life. They weren't allowed to do that. Most people considered them as if they just assumed that they were thieves, that they were the lowest part of society.

They weren't even allowed to testify in court and in legal proceedings. Their testimony would not be accepted because of the way that the culture viewed them as shepherds. And yet God chooses these people as the people that are going to be the first evangelists to share this news that the Messiah has come.

And there are people that would say, well, these gospels are just the work of man. It's fabrication. It's mythology. It's fiction. It's not real. Well, if Luke was trying to do that, why did he pick shepherds?

Why did he say shepherds were the ones? He would get no historic reliability whatsoever from that on its own. This is not a work of fiction.

This has the marks of history on it. Now, Ashlyn is the one in our family that loves to share news with people, aren't you, sweetheart? The better the news or the more exciting the news or the more dramatic the news, maybe we would say, right, Ashlyn?

[21 : 44] The more eager she is to share it with someone else. And she comes about it honest. Her dad's really the same way. Whenever something's going on, she just can't wait to tell somebody.

In fact, there are many times that driving down the road, we might have to look at Ashlyn and she's heard this many times and me and Julie would say, now Ashlyn, this is not your story to tell.

You got to let them tell it. Let Harper say what's going on with her. Let Chelsea say what's going on with her or whatever it is. And her favorite way to lead off a conversation is with what? Two words.

Guess what, right? That's how she leads every conversation. We're alike in that way. I think that's really what's happening with the shepherds here. This is such awesome news.

It's dramatic news. It's good news. It's wonderful. Everything about it is fantastic that they are motivated by the gospel message itself to actually go and share it and to say to everybody that come across, guess what?

[22 : 45] You're not going to believe it. The Messiah has come. The Savior is here. We saw him and we know it's him because this angel appeared to us and then we saw a whole bunch of angels and then it was exactly as they said and his mom's a virgin.

I don't even know how it's possible but it is and he's got to be the son of God. He's come to save us from our sins. That's what they begin to do. The truth is we don't need someone twisting our arms to go and share the gospel.

If you find yourself in a particular funk as far as evangelism is concerned, your personal evangelism, the solution for that is not to just try harder because it just doesn't work.

The solution for that is to immerse yourself all over again in the gospel because the gospel itself is what actually motivates us to do this. The gospel itself, the message of Christ itself is what pushed these men to share this news and there were two responses to their news that I want to point out to you.

Look at verse 18 first. All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. They wondered. This word for wondered, *falmazo*.

[24 : 02] Say that with me kids. Ready? *Thaumatso*. That's the Greek word here. You know what it means? It means to be amazed. Now when we think to be in wonder, the way we typically use that in English is we are conveying the idea of being perplexed.

Like this is a unique thing. This is an unusual thing. And I'm kind of curious and maybe even a little bit confused about it. But that's not exactly, kiddos, that's not exactly how Luke intended this word to be used.

It's one of his favorites. He uses it over and over and over in his gospel. Because this was the response that people most often had to Jesus.

When Jesus would come into these villages and these towns and he would teach and he would perform these miracles, Luke would say their response would be *falmazo*. They would be amazed at what they saw.

Perhaps perplexity is a minor note here. But the bigger note here is amazement. Like wow! That's amazing! And then he says here that as the shepherds went and shared this news that most of the people they wondered, they falmazo'd, they were amazed at what the shepherds were saying. [25 : 16] But here's the thing that we need to remember about this. Most of the people that were so amazed by Jesus in his ministry through his teaching and through his miracles never ended up following him as Savior because he didn't match what they wanted him to be.

He wasn't a wealthy, strong military leader. That's what they wanted, wasn't it? They were amazed at what he could do but they weren't very impressed by who he was. And especially when he starts talking about things like if you're going to come after me, you're going to have to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me. Well, they didn't like that stuff very much either. And then when he comes into the temple and he starts to cleanse the temple and then when he goes so far as he's put under trial and he's crucified on a cross, that's the point that most of them said, no way, there's no way.

It's amazing what he can do but there's no way he's the Messiah. And they walked away unbelieving. That's what's happening I think here with the shepherds.

They're running and they're telling people and they're thalmazo'd. They're amazed that something like this, if it happened, that it would happen to shepherds. They're so amazed at the story of it but that doesn't actually mean that they believed.

[26 : 35] Many people are intrigued by the stories of Jesus at Christmas. There's actually very few who actually trust him. Now I know that's true because Jesus said it was true.

Remember in the Sermon on the Mount, enter by the narrow gate, he says, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many.

But he says, for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few. And the evidence that we have in the Gospels is that lots of people were intrigued by Jesus.

Not too many people followed Jesus and wondered. But that brings us to the second response. That's in verse 19. Look, but Mary treasured up all these things pondering them in her heart.

She treasured these things. Her response is a bit different. We've seen in earlier passages that Mary was full of faith. She embraced the Gospel message but here we see she treasured.

[27 : 39] She didn't wonder at the truths. She treasured them. There's a difference. Says MacArthur, Mary's deep meditation on the Savior illustrates another aspect of what it means to embrace Christ.

Salvation's initial euphoria and excitement deepens. It deepens into richer, fuller, more profound understanding of the person and work of Christ.

The truth is that the nature of God's work through the Gospel means that one who truly believes it will grow in faith.

They will grow in love. They will grow in obedience to Jesus. The Bible says that's what happens. That may be slow growth. Some of us, it was, I think I was in the eighth grade before I broke four feet tall and a hundred pounds or something like that.

Some of us grow slower than others. That's the same thing that's true in the Christian life. Some of us grow slower than others. We mature at different rates and that's God's work. That's God's business to do in us.

[28 : 48] But growth will be there nonetheless. A wanderer is intrigued by Jesus but the Gospel ultimately has no real effect on their lives. There's no real transformation of worship.

There's no real transformation of devotion. There's no real transformation of love for God and love for Christ. There's no real transformation to continually repent from sin and press on.

They're just intrigued. They're just religious. But the one who truly comes to Christ in faith will inevitably demonstrate the life transforming power of the Gospel.

And the question is when it comes to the Gospel, when it comes to Jesus, are you a wanderer or are you a treasurer? Remember. Number four, this would be the final thing.

The Gospel prompts us to return and worship. So we've got come and see, hear and believe, go and tell, and here's this fourth point which is so good.

[29 : 53] It's so helpful. Return and worship. Verse 20, and the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

They couldn't stay in Bethlehem forever. Joseph and Mary would have found it weird for these shepherds just to camp out for a while. That's not what they did.

What did they have to do? They had to get back to their lives. They had to go back to the sheep. They had to get back and do all the things that they were supposed to do. They had to probably eventually get back to their families, all those things.

And what's the difference? When they returned, how did they return? Luke says that when they returned, they were glorifying and praising God because the gospel prompts us to do just that. We go about our lives. We can't camp out at the church gathering all week long as much as some of us would love to do that. We can't do that. We got to get back to our lives. We have to go to school.

[30 : 58] We have to go to work. We have to do the things that we do. And what's the difference for us versus those who are merely intrigued by the things of Jesus and merely pay lip service to a religious practice on a Sunday morning?

Well, the difference is as we return, we return glorifying, praising God, produces worship, genuine worship. And it's the gospel message that does this.

When a person realizes they're lost in sin and destined for eternal hell, and then they hear the message of salvation, it radically transforms their worship. It transforms our prayers.

It transforms our songs. Psalm 1 or Psalm 86 says, I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart. I will glorify your name forever.

Why? For great is your steadfast love. You have delivered my soul from the depths of death, from the depths of hell. It's radical transformation of worship.

[32 : 04] And if worship is missing in your life, or if corporate worship in the context of the Sunday gathering feels forced, almost like you have to fake it, it might be that you haven't really understood the gospel message yet.

Or it could just be that it's been a long time since you let yourself really ruminate on the wonder of the gospel. And the solution for that is the same as the solution for a lack of evangelism.

It's not to come a little earlier on a Sunday and really just try to work really hard at meaning the things that you sing. That won't last very long. The solution is immerse yourself in the gospel.

Use this Christmas day to immerse yourself in the wonder of the incarnation. Christian Getty wrote, The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing.

All things are mine since I am His. How can I keep from singing? That's what Christmas time should produce. Worship.

[33 : 15] That's what the incarnation should produce. Worship. So this Christmas morning, will you hear the call of the gospel? Don't just look at the baby in the manger.

Accept God's invitation to receive salvation in the name of Christ. He sent His Son to save you from your sins. So don't wait.

Believe. Follow Him. He invites you to come. And Jesus said, Not a single one who comes to Him in faith will He ever cast away.

And if you're a believer, if evangelism or worship has grown cold or callous, look to Jesus afresh. Just gaze at the gospel.

Think of the wonder of it. But move on from wonder. And begin to treasure it again. Treasure it again.